Depot Town Rag

November 2006

Signs of our times

100% FREE *RAG* CONTENT

Volume 21, Number 7

A PUBLICATION OF THE DEPOT TOWN ASSOCIATION, INC. The Old Caboose, 400 Market Place, Ypsilanti, Michigan 48198

Photo Lynda Hummel

"The sign brings customers"

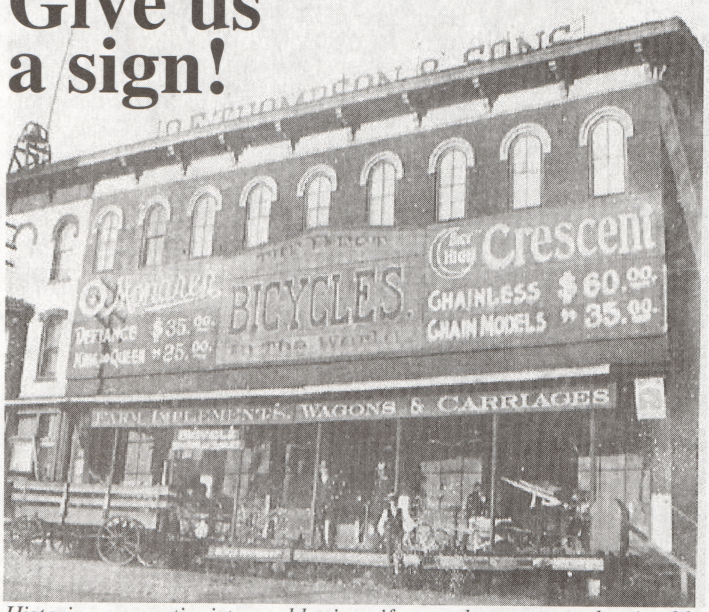
Jean De La Fontaine, [1621-1695] De La Fontaine is not to be confused with those other Frenchmen who ran Godfroy's Trading Post here later on.

Oldest traffic light in Ypsi to be replaced

DPW's Bill Bohlen says the traffic light at Cross and River Streets is one of the City's oldest, technologically, but even the Historic District Commission should be eager to see it updated. A new signal will be installed this fall with a 12-foot-deep hole for its foundation. Watch for major excavations taking place here this month.

Bollards across River Street are also planned to inhibit crossing the street between Miller Motors and the Sidetrack. The complexity of through traffic, right turns, and several railroad tracks makes it too confusing for parents with strollers and for the visually impaired say City officials. The other three crossing opportunities at that intersection will remain well marked by the "walk/don't walk" signals.

Give us a sign!



Historic preservationists would cringe if a merchant proposed a sign like O.E. Thompson's in 1905, but it's part of our history nonetheless. Depot Town's leading entrepreneur had a flair for advertising unequaled today. In the 1960s the same façade was covered with archery targets. Note the fire bell at top left, mounted above the west side's fire barn.

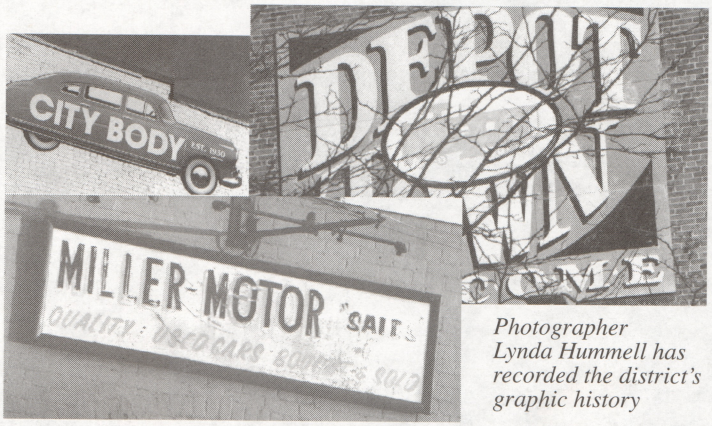
Improvs featured at Dreamland

Vegan Meat Locker performs improvisational comedy—the same sort of comedy seen on TV's *Who's Line is It Anyway.* Combine their energy with your attendance and you'll get a one-of-a-kind show that you won't see anywhere else.

Vegan Meat Locker has been performing in Depot Town since June of 2005 and has performed almost exclusively for the Dreamland Theater.

Tickets are $5 and their next shows are on Friday, November 3 & 17. There's an intermission between acts so people can run next door to Café Luwak and grab a drink or snack!

For more information, contact: bugtank@gmail.com



Photographer Lynda Hummell has recorded the district's graphic history

Signs of life at the depot

Urban archeologists can tell a lot about a commercial district as they examine the quality of graphic advertising over the years. Much of this district's earliest signage has faded away, but clues remain about businesses and community life over nearly two hundred years.

What we seem to be getting away with at the present time:

Advertising art: City ordinances dictate what goes up and what comes down. Historic District properties conform to more traditional designs.

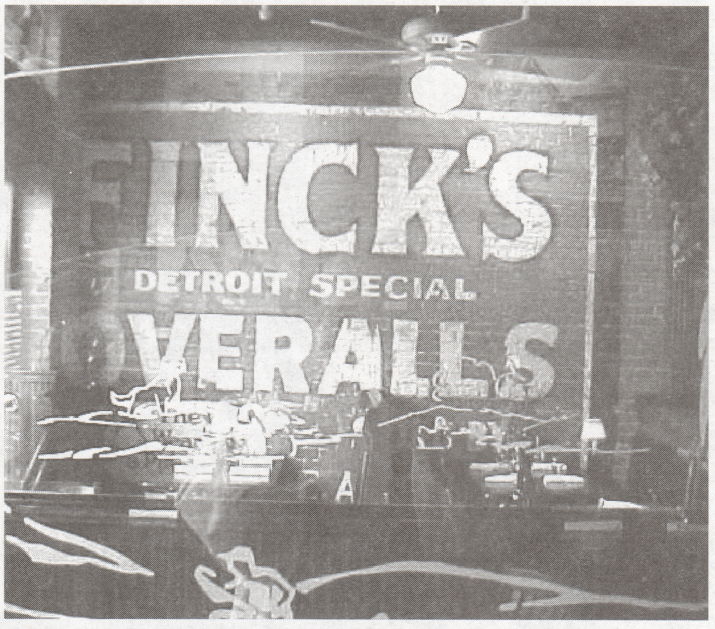
Billboards: Previously called posters, still prove to be the standard in this neighborhood. Free-standing highway signs just don't make it here.

Fliers & posters: Fliers go up on posts and walls all over town and some folks even take them down when their event has passed.

Window signs: Anything can appear in a shop window; size, content, design usually emphasize what's inside.

Sidewalk signs: Sandwich boards, officially banned, still pop up on our sidewalks and enjoy popular approval if well executed.

With the advent of electricty, blinking, flashing, pulsating, and plastic inflatable waving-at-you-like-some-kind-of-a-wild banshee signs became popular in some communities—but not in this historic district. Depot Town advertisers have found the old ways to be truly the best for their contemporary marketplace. The advertising style of the Nineteenth century seems to fit this block just fine.



One of the best preserved examples of outdoor advertising in the district is now indoors. When Bill and Sandee French expanded Cady's Grill & Bar in its earliest incarnation, they found remnants of a poster for "FINCK'S OVERALLS - THEY WEAR LIKE A PIG'S NOSE." Once an outside wall, it was covered over when Sinkule's Market was built. Now in revitalized red, white, and blue, it dominates a wall over elegant booths and tables for dining. That rustic and bucolic theme seems not to have diminished the appetite of Cady's diners.

Now, there's a bad sign:

1989 – Year that a signboard tallying the U.S. national debt was erected near New York City's Times Square.

2007 - Year in which it is expected to run out of digits.

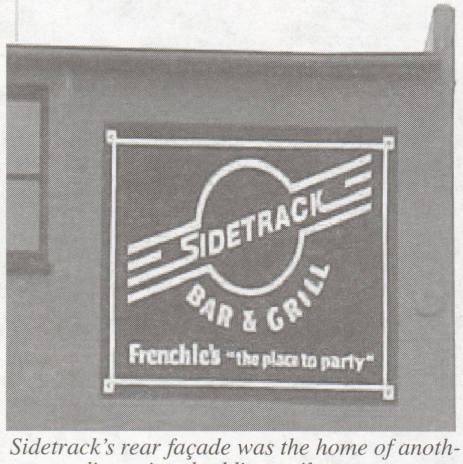
The pawn shop's sign

Although Ypsi's pawn shops are now out in the Township on East Michigan Avenue, the following historical account from Henry Vollam Morton in 1892 explains the design of their traditional 3-ball signage.

"St. Nicholas, in addition to protecting sailors, children, travelers, and merchants, is also the patron saint of pawnbrokers. The story goes that a nobleman of the saint's native town, Parara in Asia Minor, had lost all his money and did not know how he could endow his three beautiful daughters. St. Nicholas, hearing of his trouble, went by night and flung through the window three bags of gold with which the nobleman was able to provide handsome dowries. These three bags are shown in all early icons as three gold apples, and the gold apples of St. Nicholas are the origin of the pawnbroker's sign."

Tradition dictates style on this block

In the distance, the Hudson sign was not original to Miller Motors, but fit as perfectly as if the Historic District Commission had special-ordered it for this location.



Sidetrack's rear façade was the home of another two-dimensional oddity until recent years: a vine that had grown into a near-perfect three-story map of the State of Michigan--showing both the upper and lower peninsulae.

The Sidetrack Bar & Grill and Frenchie's billboard, above right, on the south wall of their building was superimposed over "Depot Exchange Antiques" a few years ago and follows the nineteenth century tradition of outdoor commercial advertising.

At left, their sandwich board style goes even further into history when hawkers would wear the pup-tent-like two-sided poster as they walked around the neighborhood, doing magic tricks, juggling, and singing songs to call attention to that business's services—much as some pizza companies or tax-preparers have done recently.

DBA signs are nominal

According to Washtenaw County rules and regs, registering your business under the "Doing Business As..." (DBA) regulation is much easier and more direct if the owner's name is featured as the name of the business.

There's only one of those in Depot Town, but the intent may be confusing to some, since "James MacDonald's Antiques" shares the store space with "Apple Annie's Vintage Clothing." Many see the two as a single business.

"James," of course, fits the DBA mode, but "Annie" is a peudonym for Lynn Radtke and would not qualify. Together, they have brought antiquities to the block since 1976 and the children from these two families certainly fit the theme of last month's local kids' success stories seen here in *The Rag*.

SILVER & GOLD COINS
Olde Towne Coin & Gold
Certified Member ANA/JA/PNG/MRA/N.F.I.B.
In historic Depot Town for 25 years
24 E. Cross Street **734.483.6155**
FAX: 734.485.8300

SIDETRACK Bar and Grill
rated by GQ Magazine - Top best Burger in the country
Reserve **FRENCHIE'S** for your next meeting
56 E. Cross Street 734.483.1035
20% off entire meal

HARRINGTON'S
STANDARD PRINTING
In historic Depot Town
John & Pattie Harrington
120 East Cross Street 734.483.0339
Ypsilanti, MI 48198 Fax 734.483.3130
email: info@ypsistandard.com

Vital Signs Ypsilanti
Signs • Banners • Vehicles • Windows • Logo Design
17 E. Clark Road Ypsilanti, MI 48198
VITALSIGNSYPSI@COMCAST.NET
734-483-5701
New location
River St. & Clark Rd., 1 Mile North of Cross St.
Bill Labedzki, owner

A graphic flash when the atmosphere is just right...

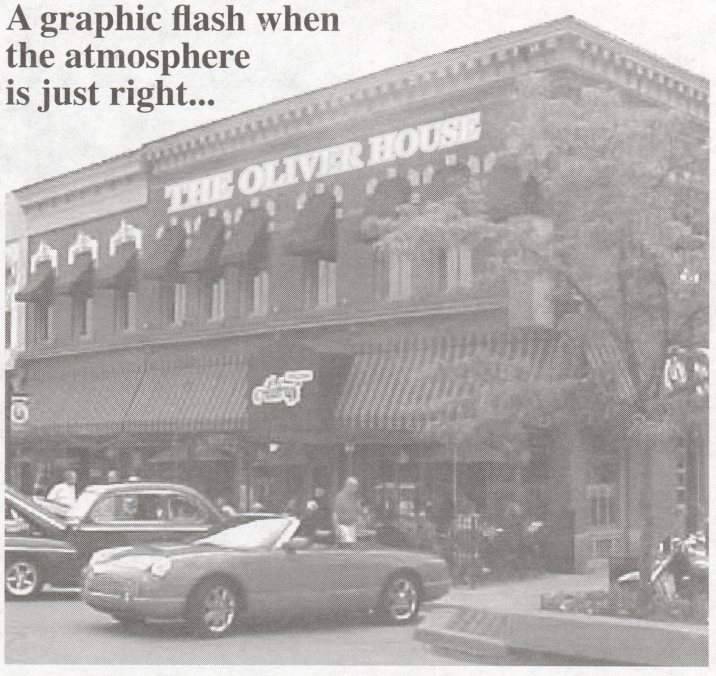
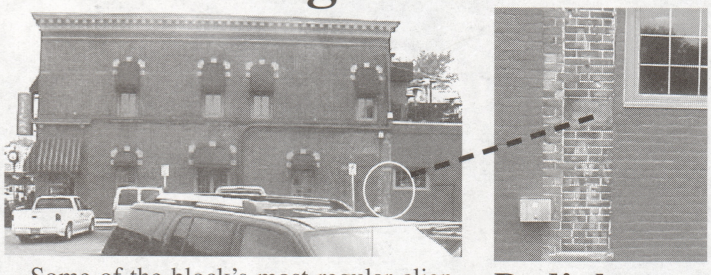


Photo enhanced, but similar to the actual effect described

When the atmosphere is just right, skillful observers say they can read "THE OLIVER HOUSE" at the top of the front façade of Aubree's Saloon. Even more mysterious is the off-and-on again appearance of the smaller "LUNCH" and "BUFFET" on the saloon's wall facing the depot. Sandee French says she may bring these two small signs back—and without having to get permission from the Historic District Commission since she'll only be restoring to their original form and the lunch and buffet activity continues inside.

Giant mysteries inhabit the old neighborhood



Some of the block's most regular clientelle have walked past yet another sign on Aubree's east wall: "DAD'S TAVERN" whispers softly from the brick column that was once the rear of the building. No wonder it's not painted over. Dad may still be here.

Apparently New Hampshire does it differently

-The Old Man of the Mountain, Daniel Webster, [1782-1852]

"Men hang out their signs indicative of their respective trades: shoemakers hang out a gigantic shoe; jewelers, a monster watch; and the dentist hangs out a gold tooth; but up in the mountains of New Hampshire, God Almighty has hung out a sign to show that there He makes men."

Dad's happy melodrama

"Is my Daddy in there?"

"Get away from them swingin' doors, boy."

"But I want my Daddy!"

"What's your Daddy's name, kid?"

"My Daddy is John Brown."

"John Brown? Why that's my name!"

"Father!"

"Son!"

Can't face the music?

There has been no response, yet, to September's challenge of a sing-off of Ann Arbor's and Ypsilanti's hometown boosterism melodies—no word from such A^2 luminaries as Bob Seeger, Iggy Pop, or Andrew WK. But there's a big list of Ypsi songs just waiting to be resurrected if Tree Town can get its tunes together: "Ypsilanti Comic Song" (I've got an auntie who lives in a shanty in Ypsilanti, Michigan), "A Depot Town Rag," "Alibi Guy," "The City's Song," "Everything's Up To Code in Ypsilanti," "Back to Ypsilanti," and, oh, so many more snappy melodies.

The offer still stands: Ann Arbor and Ypsilanti songs sung at barside; the singers who run out of titles first pick up the tab.

Email the *Rag* editor to accept the challenge: thomasdodd@comcast.net.

Design company has its origin here

Mother daughter team, Carolyn McKeever and Diane C. Brown are known for the many unique poster designs for the Ypsilanti Heritage Festivals over the years, but their works reach far beyond the confines of Ypsilanti's historic Depot Town and its festivals.

McKeever started out as a design student at Detroit's Cass Technical High School, then went on to arts degrees at WSU and EMU. She started doing her first ads for Detroit clients in 1950. When working for her Master of Fine Arts, McKeever discovered studio space in Depot Town and neighborhood graphics have not been the same since.

During that time, McKeever and her husband, Gary, have each served as president of the Depot Town Association several times. Gary was reelected DTA president last month.

Daughter Diane C. Brown brought her computer design and silk screen logo expertise to join her mother in 1985 and, with the business name AdArt, they have produced brochures, fliers, and newspaper advertising accoeunts for Cunningham and Kinsel drug stores and John R. Lumber in Detroit, and for companies in Cleveland, Chicago, and Florida.

More recently, AdArt executed layout, design, and production work of magazines for Ford's Rawsonville plant, taking copy and design from the raw data to finished product.

With McKeever's contacts in Depot Town and Brown's business base Brooklyn, MI, they have kept their creative advertising art business going for a collective 77 years.

McKeever says she has no designs, yet, on retirement.

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www.worldofrocks.com
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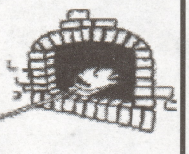
Just south of Depot Town

Ad Art
♦ concepts ♦ designs ♦ screenprinting ♦ ad specialties
Diane C. Brown
236 Kirkley Dr., Brooklyn, MI • (517)592-8708
• e-mail: dianebrownadart@aol.com • FAX: (517) 592-3585

Ypsilanti Food Co-Op
and the River Street Bakery
312 North River
Ypsilanti, MI 48198
734-483-1520
Fresh Bread in the tradition of hearth baked artisan breads available Monday Wednesday and Friday evenings



Gone, but still remembered

J.C. Beal Construction's temporary sign covers part of the space where O.E. Thompson & Son's originally splayed their family name

There are many on the block today who can remember the giant plywood archery targets that once covered the windows of the Thompson Block, but are there any around who can remember the big diagonal sign (fake rendition above) on the south wall of the former Civil War barracks?

Other billboards have disappeared as well: "SWAMP ROOT" once shouted its curative remedies from the east wall of the Norris Block (Dreamland Theatre, Café Luwak, Paula's Barbershop), but was later replaced with "MAIL POUCH TOBACCO."

They're all gone now.

"I think that I
shall never see
A billboard
lovely as a tree
Perhaps, unless the
billboards fall,
I'll never see
a tree at all."

-Ogden Nash, perhaps our most underappreciated American poet

In the December *Rag*:

Windows on a smaller, friendlier world make things look different from the outside and from the inside––one more small distinction from the mall mentality.

A portrait of his son in featured at Nelson Amos' Studio

Depot Town Rag

www.depottown.com

"All the news that fits, we print"
A monthly publication of the
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P.O. Box 970235
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DTA business email:
depottown@yahoogroups.com
***Rag* editor:**
thomasdodd@comcast.net

The Depot Town Association, Inc.

Gary McKeever, President
Mary Decker, Vice President
Ray Strassel, Treasurer
Sandee French,
Secretary & Past President

DTA meets at 6:30 p.m on the third Wednesday of each month at Harrington's Standard Printing, 120 East Cross Street.

October's raffle winner

is Janet Weidmayer of Ann Arbor. She wins 25 Depot Town Dollars for filling out her winning raffle coupon at Salt City Antiques.

"A couple of friends and I got together and decided to go down to the depot in Ypsilanti for a day of shopping in all those great little antique shops," says Weidmayer.

"We first ate at Cady's Grill and at the Sidetrack later on and just had a wonderful day."

What is more fun than a day of shopping and eating in this commecial district? Winning a gift certificate for doing so!

2007 ads?
Contact
The Rag's Classified Department
734-646-5674
or
depottown
events
@yahoo.com

Brick paths will see spring '07 installation

Time is running out to buy personalized bricks for Depot Town's new crosswalks. Don't delay! The newest installation of commemorative bricks will create two more personalized crosswalks across East Cross Street.

Are you a business who wants to leave your mark in Depot Town? Are you an individual who wants to pay tribute to someone? Personalized bricks make a great gift!

Two sizes of bricks are available. Bricks are $100 and $200 each and allow for three and six lines of text respectively.

To order your commemorative brick, go to http://www.depottown.org/campaign.html to download your order form. Depot Town Association accepts credit cards, cash, and checks.

Keep in touch through permission-based email

Depot Town "regulars" can sign up for DTA's new e-mail program for updates on neighborhood festivals and events. Free Gift Certificates and tickets to festivals can be found here as well. Winners will be announced on the Depot Town email service.

Subscribers' e-mail address will remain confidential and will not be sold to anyone. This information will be shared only with Depot Town Merchants. Sign-up cards will be available in the neighborhood shops this month.

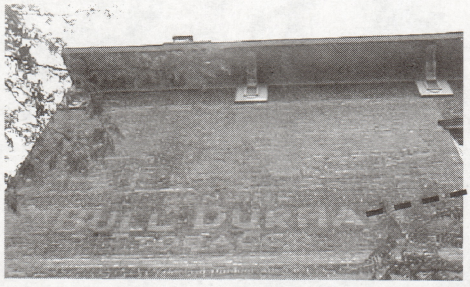
Commercial property available
1 January 2007
44 East Cross
1450 square feet
(Dreamland Theatre needs more space and is moving downtown.)
Call R. Richie:
734-834-0416

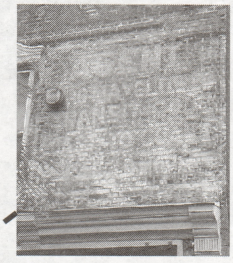
Edward Jones
Serving Individual Investors Since 1871
2058 Washtenaw Avenue
Ypsilanti, MI 48197
Business: 734-480-8980
Fax: 888-817-0043
Toll-free: 800-440-0657
Cellular: 734-223-0433
Residence: 734-528-9145
Les Heddle
Investment Representative

Sheila M. Johnson Lander C. McLoyd
Law Offices
Johnson & McLoyd, PLC
Depot Town
308 N. River Street
Ypsilanti, MI 48198
734.544.4500 FAX 734.669.9081

penny candy • old fashioned toys & home goods • popcorn • ice cream
GORDON'S G FIVE & DIME
Katherine Gordon
Shannon Gordon
owners
Toys & Treats for Kids and Kids-at-Heart
23 E. Cross Street
734.482.1830
Fax 734.482.1831

History writ large on westworks of the Follett House





Close scrutinty reveals some of the words from a yellow-and-cream colored sign above the west window of Quinn's Essentials. Can you fill in any of the blanks? (see below)

Top row: *"AGENT"*
2nd row: *(ventilator) ROMAVELO?*
3rd row: *TRANSIT CO.*
4th row: *??AS???IO CO.?*
Bottom row: *???*

Classic Victorian sensibilities were flaunted in early Ypsi

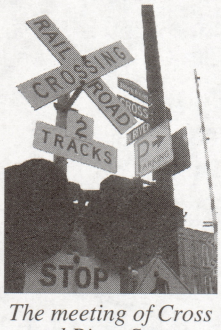
"BULL DURHAM TOBACCO" still peeks from the paint above the "MAYFLOWER MOVING CO" banner that stretches the length of the building, but the controversial bull has long since wandered off.

In the tobacco company's earliest signs, their trademark bovine stood in all his maleness contentedly chewing his cud. After objections from many town councils, the company painted a post and rail fence in front of Ferdinand's profile. Careful observation of Ypsilanti's example can still tell us a bit about the decorum of an earlier City Council.

The west wall of Ypsilanti's historic Follett House hotel (above) holds a history book of commercial activity at the depot. Called "billboards" in their original form, the signs were painted directly on the walls facing in-coming traffic with promises of the delights to be found in the neighborhood. Tobacco, moving and storage, and DTA's more recent "DEPOT TOWN WELCOME" with its pink caboose still smile down at folks arriving from points to the west.

The faded layers of the sign at top right leaves much to viewers' imagination, but the "Agent" below leaves less to speculation.

The crux of the situation



The meeting of Cross and River Streets is made even more fascinating by the intersection of the rail line at the exact, same location. While some towns seem embarrassed at their relationship to the railroad, Ypsilanti revels in it.

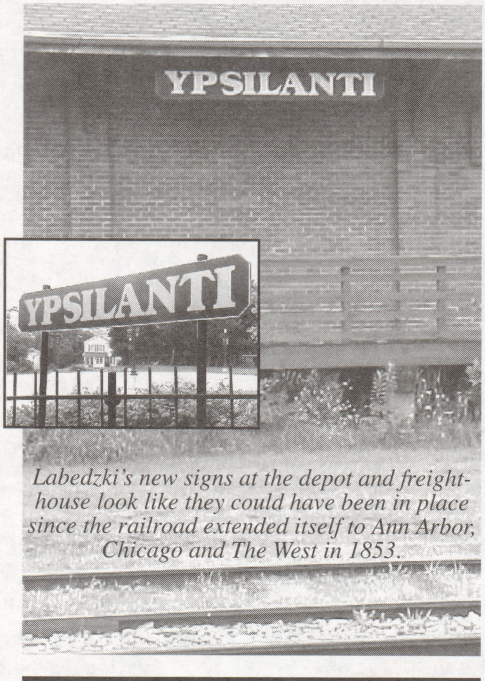
Labedzki's signs are vital

Nobody knows signs like Bill Labedzki knows signs. In recent years, Labedski has painted many of the examples seen in Depot Town and in downtown Ypsilanti. Awning signs, free-standing signs, wall signs, canvas and vinyl banners, vinyl letters, truck lettering, and more—Labedzki knows them all.

Now quartered in barns at his home at the north end of River Street, Labedzki's Vital Signs company can create the most traditional signs with the most modern techniques and media. In addition to signage, he knows the local ordinances and fits our graphic bragging into legally acceptable modes.

Some recent works from the studios at Vital Signs: the Historic District street sign additions, Freighthouse, Ypsilanti Farmers' Market, MCRR depot, Frenchie's, Cady's, Creation Station, Quinn's Essentials, Salt City Antiques, Nelson Amos Studio, Cheeky Monkey, Ypsilanti Automotive Heritage Collection, Quizno's, Esquire Interiors, Gordon's Five & Dime, The Gifted Basket, Standard Printing, and many more both in Depot Town and downtown.

Bill Labedzki's Vital Signs enterprise certainly lives up to the double entendre implied in its name.



Labedzki's new signs at the depot and freight-house look like they could have been in place since the railroad extended itself to Ann Arbor, Chicago and The West in 1853.

the gifted basket
Gift Baskets & Goodies for all occassions corporate & personal
734.480.0764
35 E. Cross Street
www.gifted-basket.com
10% off one regular priced item

Quinn's Essentials
19 E. Cross Street
734.544.4690
Home Decor, Unique Gifts, Jewelry, Clothing
TempurPedic™ Mattresses
Pandora Jewelry & Trollbeads

ENCHANTED FLORIST, inc.
46 E. Cross St. • Ypsilanti, MI 48198
(734) 547-9230
"Service with a personal touch."
Specializing in all of your personal & corporate needs
$5 off an in-store purchase of $19.95 or more
free local delivery on arrangements of $29.95 and up (a value of $7.95)
Only one offer can be used at a time. Not valid with any other offer or in-store specials.

…and Ypsilanti Heritage Automotive Collection has acres of some of the flashiest neon auto advertising extant. Truth to tell, some aficianadoes of antiques are as much attracted by the signage as the actual automobiles.

A more recent local history of signage

Thirty years ago, when DTA petitioned the City for directional signs to this block, City powers responded saying it would be "unfair to others" to direct traffic that way.

DTA pointed out the fairness of the Interstate highway signs at Huron Street indicating Detroit to the east, Chicago to the west. "Who wants to drive all that way by guessing the direction?" DTA argued.

Imagine a family's disappointment looking for the Cobo Hall Christmas exhibit but finding themselves at McCormick Center on the other side of Lake Michigan.

Depot Town's argument won the debate and now Ypsilanti street signs point out downtown, Depot Town, and the Eastern Michigan University campus. Otherwise, tourists might wind up in Ann Arbor — and we can imagine their surprise.

RAGTIME

We Welcome Winter

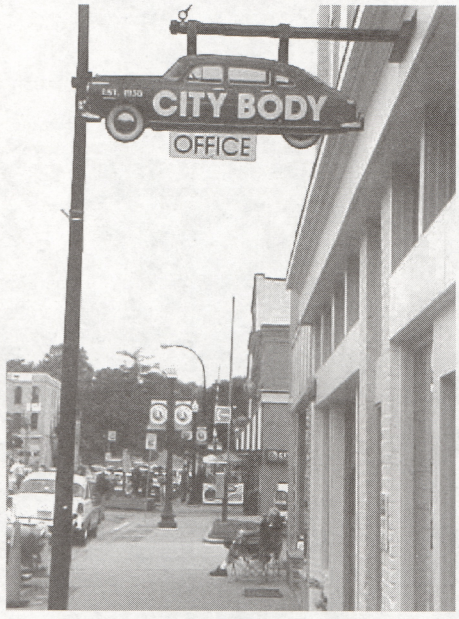
Coming events

Friday, 3 & 17 November
Vegan Meat Locker
improvisational comedy
at Dreamland Theater

November 5-11
USA Hockey
Four-Nation Tournaments
Russia, Slovakia, Switzerland
Over 150 players, fans, and scouts
from around the world
staying at Ypsilanti Marriott

Friday, December 8
MOONLIGHT MAGIC
w/ specials all weekend
Sales in the shops
Open late • Street Singers

Southeastern Michigan
New Year Jubilee
31 December
A family celebration at more than
a dozen sites in Depot Town and
downtown Ypsilanti



Iconography reaches new heights of subtlety with the Sobbry brothers' unique sign above their front entry. Stretching the Hudson motorcar theme to the far end of the block, Scott and Bruce's red 1950s Hudson (see their sponsoring ad below) also waves from the east and west walls of their auto body repair business, recalling a day when more such signs announced the trade to be found within.

Baked-on Automotive Finishes • Complete Collision Repair
CITY BODY EST. 1930
20 E. Cross St. • Ypsilanti, MI 48198
734.482.4737 • 482.9353 • FAX: 482-0181
SCOTT SOBBRY BRUCE SOBBRY

Depot Town Counseling Center
Therapy for adolescents & adults
Diane Louise Parfitt, Ph.D., LPC, LLP
Medical Acupuncture
Brenda Donaldson, M.D.
Inner Wisdom: Philosophical Counselor
Kate Mehuron, Ph.D.
302 N. Huron • 734-481-1200

Are You Focused On Your *Passions* In Life?
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Life Design sessions will help you create a design for pursuing your passions in life.
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A New Dining Experience!
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• Stroh's Premium Ice Cream
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Happy Hour Specials Daily
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